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OF THE

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A P O L O G Y
FOR THE MORE
FREQUENT ADMINISTRATION
OF THE
LORD'S SUPPER;
WITH
ANSWERS TO THE OBJECTIONS URGED
AGAINST IT.

BY THE REV. JOHN BROWN,
LATE MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT HADDINGTON, AND
PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY UNDER THE ASSOCIATE
(BURGHER) SYNOD.

He being dead, yet speaketh.

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P R E F A C E.

THE Writer of the following *Apology* is well known to the religious Public. He was long a respectable member of the Associate Church, and filled the Chair of Professor of Divinity with universal approbation. As a Scholar and Divine he had few equals. The numerous editions of several of his Works, are the best proof of the estimation in which he is held as an Author. He left two copies of the following *Apology* among his papers; one of which appears to have been corrected for publication. He much regretted the unfrequent administration of the Lord's Supper, and did what was in his power to correct the abuse. He was the first who introduced the dispensation of it in the Secession twice a-year; before, it was only annual. Farther he found it impracticable to carry it. But the time is now come when a greater reformation might be effected. In several places it is already begun, and it is hoped that it will soon be universal. Reader, throw prejudice aside, read with candour, and act according to your convictions.

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CUSTOM often authorises practices and principles so much, that one is sometimes ready to lay down even life itself in defence of them; but it certainly becomes every Christian to examine the most general and inveterate customs by reason and revelation, and to reject or receive the same, according as they abide the test or not. On this footing, I here presume to call to the bar the practice of administering the sacrament of the Lord's supper so seldom, and am persuaded, that the more frequent administration of this ordinance should take place. My reasons are the following:—

- I. In the apostolic times it was ordinarily administered every Sabbath, as is granted by all those who have inquired into the history of these

times*. This frequency has the approbation of the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. ii. 25, 26. "This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death until he come." Here he expresses himself in such a manner as plainly approves of the accustomed frequency of the administration of this ordinance. Things peculiar to the apostolic age, were all such as tended to the founding of churches. But the sacrament of the supper has no connection with the founding, but with the building up and strengthening of churches. Have Christians now less need of this ordinance? Is Christ now less able or willing to supply their need? or, Has he transferred the virtue and usefulness of this ordinance to another? If none of these can be pretended, why count the example of the apostles a sufficient warrant for the observation of the first day Sabbath, for public worship, for holding synods and presbyteries, if we count not their example in the frequent administration of the supper also worthy of, and fit for our imitation?

II. That the sacrament of the Lord's supper was generally administered every Lord's day, for the space of about 300 years, is beyond dispute †. If

* Luke xxiv. 30, 31, 35. Acts ii. 42, 46. chap. xx. 7.
1 Cor. xi. 20, 21. Pliny, Justin Martyr, Chrysostom,
&c.

† Vide Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Augustine, Minu-

this practice was sinful, how is it that no witness was ever raised up to oppose it as a profanation of the ordinance? If it was duty, why follow we not the footsteps of the flock, and ask for the good old way that we may walk therein?

III. All the Protestant Divines that I have read on this point, declare themselves zealous for the more frequent administration of this ordinance. Calvin in his Institutes, p. 704, says, "It ought to be administered every Lord's day, and the custom of communicating once a-year, has been introduced by the wiles of the devil." Dr Owen, Cat. p. 177, says, "It is to be administered every first day of the week, or at least as frequently as opportunity and convenience can be obtained." Luther, in preface to Cat. says, "He does not deserve the name of a Christian, that can content himself with communicating less than three or four times a-year." I pass over Doolittle, Campbell, Willison, Henry, and a multitude of others, because I can add,

IV. All the Protestant churches have opposed the administration of the sacrament of the supper only once or twice a-year, as a Popish corruption; and have appointed a more frequent administration of it, as soon as they shook off the yoke of

tius Felix, Cyprian, Fortunatus, Basil, Ambrose, Jerom, and others of the ancient fathers, who either expressly state the fact, or allude to it.

Antichrist. Thus, at the Reformation, the church of Geneva appointed it to be administered twelve times in the year; the church of Scotland, in her first book of discipline, four times a-year; the church of France, at least four times; and resolve to appoint a more frequent dispensation of it, as soon as convenient; the church of Holland, six times; nay, the lowest I find upon this point is the church of England, which is well known to be behind most of the Protestant churches in many things—the appointed it only thrice in the year. If these churches, then, when the darkness and ignorance of people were not yet dispelled by the light of the purity of the gospel, appointed so frequent an administration of this ordinance, have not we reason to believe they would have administered it still more frequently, had the spirit of reformation continued with them, till they, by painful instruction, had more fully banished ignorance from the people?

It ought not to be objected, that all these acts were not always put in practice, for, it is certain, mens sentiments are better known from their declarations and decisions than from their practice. It is easier to decide and to declare, than to practise. Many neglected to administer the supper from very trifling reasons: some from sloth; and others from want of a fund to defray the charges; as if He, whose is the silver and the gold, could not have provided a single penny for every communicant, one with another, to purchase bread

and wine to represent the body and blood of his beloved Son, in an ordinance so dear to him.

V. The means by which the unfrequent administration of this ordinance appears to me to have been introduced into the church, do not favour of the God of truth. The causes that occasioned its introduction appear to have been pride, superstition, covetousness, and carnal complaisance. The eastern hermits, retiring from the society of men, had taken up their residence in deserts and mountains, and being far removed from the places of its administration, seldom attended. This, though really the effect of their sloth and distance, they pretended to arise from their regard and reverence for this most solemn ordinance. It being easy to imitate them in this imaginary holiness, which lay in neglecting the ordinance of God, many of the eastern Christians left off to communicate, except at such times as superstition had rendered solemn, as at pasch; and contented themselves with being spectators on other occasions. On account of this practice, we find the great and eloquent Chrysostom, once and again, bitterly exclaiming against them as guilty of the highest contempt of God and Christ; and calls their practice a most wicked custom. A custom of sending part of the consecrated elements to the absent, that they might partake of them in their own houses, now also taking place, frequently one or two of a family or village having joined in

the public administration, carried off so much of the elements as might be divided among those who staid behind, or reserved it for their own use afterward. This odd way of communicating being no way painful or expensive, many of the people were abundantly fond of it, and the number of communicants became by these means very small.

Further, the Christian people having got the supreme magistrate upon their side, thought themselves now more secure in the possession of their worldly wealth, and, therefore, were so much the more loath to part with it, in giving offerings every Sabbath. On these offerings the primitive ministers lived, and * out of them the elements were taken ; and, as it was discreditable then to partake without offering, except the person were known to be very poor, too many chose rather, for the most part of the year, to abstain from the sacramental table, than part with a little of their beloved substance. If the people were churlish, the priests were equally covetous. Though they now began to have other funds assigned them for their subsistence, they were far from being willing to part with the ancient offerings ; therefore, when they saw it was not possible to cause the people bring them every Sabbath, they reduced the frequency of the administration of the supper,

* The offerings of the primitive Christians were usually presented in kind.

in expectation that the people would attend better, and bring larger offerings. And in order to inflame them the more powerfully to this, the clergy fixed the administration to times now consecrated by superstition, and began, by little and little, to persuade the people that their offerings were meritorious, and were a proper sacrifice for the atonement of their sins. Hence sprung at last that notion, that so much as was consecrated was turned into Christ's real body and blood, and was, as such, offered by the priests to atone for the sins of the quick and the dead.

Besides, when the Christian church began to share the smiles and support of the emperor and his court, multitudes, influenced by carnal motives, thronged into it, and the reins of discipline being now relaxed, they were easily admitted, though indeed many of them were far from being visible saints. These carnal and court Christians disliked being from week to week employed in self-examination, and other preparatory work, or living under the impression of so frequent solemn approaching to God. They also disliked the simplicity of this, as well as of other gospel ordinances, and were mightily fond that the Christian worship should be modelled as near to the Pagan and Jewish forms as possible. The clergy, possessed with the same vitiated taste, and, besides, being very solicitous to procure themselves the favour of the great, transformed the Christian worship according to these patterns; and as the Pagans

had in the year only a few solemn feasts in honour of their gods, and the Jews had only three solemn feasts, the feast of the Passover at Easter, the feast of Harvest at Pentecost, and the feast of Tabernacles, they appointed the supper to be administered to the people at Christmas, to supply the place of the feast of the Bacchanals, and at Easter and Pentecost, to supply the place of two of the Jewish feasts. However, this conforming of Christ's ordinance (as now indeed is also the case) did not procure due attendance on it, and therefore the clergy afterwards reduced the administration of it to the people to once, namely Easter.

By these means, and in this manner, it appears to me, from the hints of the history of these times which I can come to the knowledge of, was the unfrequency of the administration of the Lord's supper chiefly introduced. The clergy, however, pretended regard to the solemnity of the ordinance as the reason of all these alterations ; and I doubt not but some good men were so blinded, as to imagine that their conduct had a real tendency to produce this effect.

VI. As often as the church of Christ has been in a flourishing slate, greater frequency has been practised or pushed. Thus it was in the primitive ages ; thus it was at the Reformation ; thus it was in that glorious assembly of the church of Scotland, 1638 ; thus also the Westminster Assembly of Divines declare in their Directory, that

it should be frequently administered. While things went in some measure well after the Revolution, sundry acts were passed to encourage and press the more frequent administration of it; and the Assembly appoint presbyteries to order the administration of it, so that people may have opportunity to communicate every month of the year.

On the other hand, a declension toward the infrequent celebration of this ordinance, has been generally the close attendant of apostasy and backsliding. Thus, under Popery, the administration was reduced from once every week, to three times, and afterwards to once a-year; and however much this last was practised, yet it was never authorised till Popery had arrived at a prodigious height. The same monster of a Pope, and dape of a council did, in A. D. 1215, first ratify the doctrine of Transubstantiation, and then pass an act, allowing the administration of the supper to the people, and their partaking of it once a-year, to be sufficient; though even that act intimates, that it is lawful to do it oftener.

In the first period of Episcopacy in Scotland, the administration of the supper was reduced from twice or four times a-year to once, namely, at Easter. Thus also in the second period of Episcopacy, though in the period before the ministers had pushed, some or all of them practised a more frequent administration, the perjured bishops and

curates reduced it to once a-year, and had not latter been the child of superstition, it is likely it would have been still more infrequent.

In the present period of apostasy, have we not known this ordinance neglected two, three, or even seven years together, by some ministers? and would it not be more so, if fear of being forced to refund what they yearly receive for communion elements, did not influence many ministers more than their consciences do?

VII. God's witnesses for truth in backsliding periods, have been wont to bear witness in favour of the more frequent administration of this ordinance. Thus these men of God, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, &c. exclaim bitterly against the reduction of it to a few times in the year; and when things were yet worse, as to the infrequency of it, in the ninth century, Bertram and Rabanus, the two most learned and upright men of the age, testified against it, and insisted that the custom of their times should be corrected by the primitive pattern. About 1627, Messrs Robert Blair and Cunningham agreed each to have it four times a-year. About 1630, these great men of God in Ireland who witnessed against Episcopacy, namely, Messrs John Livington, Robert Blair, Robert Cunningham, Josias Welsh, &c. administered this sacrament twice a-year to their people, and were disposed to have done it oftener, had one or ten of them, being situated within about

twenty miles, concerted measures so as the bulk of their people communicated eighteen or twenty times in the year.

VIII. The unfrequent administration of this ordinance, tends to encourage looseness in practice among professors. These are generally under some impressions of the awe and dread of God, when they are approaching to this ordinance, which, were it frequently repeated, might be deepened and increased; but, when they approach it so seldom, they, as Calvin says, receive it as a clearance of accounts with God, and so give up themselves to sloth and sin, till another sacramental occasion excites some fresh concern.

Besides, ministers administering this ordinance unfrequently, tends to encourage people to partake of it seldom, as they see no more warrant for frequent participation, than for frequent administration.

IX. It cannot be denied that this ordinance is, of all others, the most calculated for communicating spiritual supplies of grace; for enabling the believer to defeat the devil and indwelling lusts, and to overcome the world in all its allurements; for intimating the love of Christ, and giving discoveries of him in his glory and blessings, and bringing him near unto the arms of faith; for finding pardon, conveying comforts, clearing doubt, kindling, quickening, and strengthen-

live to Christ and his people. Have not believers then frequently need of it? and, if it should prove such an ordinance to them, as it will do if conscientiously managed, would it not be much to their advantage frequently to partake of it? What wonders of saints were the primitive Christians, who communicated every Sabbath! What wonders of saints were those in the north of Ireland in 1630, who communicated eighteen or twenty times a-year! What if the great want of love to the brethren, in comparison of what took place in the primitive times, be owing to our self-partaking of this ordinance!

If the conscientious improvement of this ordinance did so remarkably to the advantage of believers, ought they not frequently to partake of it? Ought they not, if possible, to go to the utmost extent of frequency that Christ allows? It will not be denied, that Christ allows conscientious communicating every Sabbath. Now, if Christ does so, shall men not allow it? Shall ministers, if possible, not order matters so, that believers may have opportunity to communicate conscientiously, as often as Christ allows them?

Again, if frequent communicating be commendable, frequent administration is so too; for in every congregation there are many who, by reason of service, weakness, poverty, &c. cannot travel to a sacrament at ten, twelve, twenty, thirty, or forty miles distance. Servants cannot

be allowed so many days as are necessary for going to, attending on, and returning from the ordinance, if it is dispensed at a distance. The weak cannot walk. The poor cannot afford the necessary expences, especially when it is considered that, in many places, poor strangers are taken little notice of, even by those who are sufficiently able to take them in; from which it follows, that if persons have not the means of maintaining themselves, they must starve if they venture to come abroad to such occasions. Is it not the poor of the flock who especially wait upon Christ? Now, if their richer brethren by profession cruelly prevent their being able to communicate abroad, ought not ministers, if possible, to give them the opportunity at home? Is it not then merciless, is it not cruel, in an overseer of souls, to allow such persons but one or two sacramental meals in the year, when it lies in his power to afford them more? Christ allows them to communicate every Sabbath; Christ's servants voluntarily refuse to allow them to communicate above once or twice in the year, by keeping away the sacrament from their bounds!

X. Every Seceding minister does, in his ordination vows and otherwise, solemnly approve the administration of the sacrament of the supper more frequently than is at present practised, and, either more or less directly, promises to practise it if

possible. Do not Seceding ministers, in their ordination vows, adhere to the Testimony? Yes, surely. Well, does not the Testimony expressly adhere to the first Book of Discipline, except in such things as were particularly calculated for the circumstances of that time in which it was written? And, does not the first Book of Discipline appoint, that every minister celebrate the Lord's supper four times a-year. Now, can it be said that this is a matter peculiarly calculated for the circumstances of that period? On the contrary, it is certain that the people were ignorant, and had little means of instruction; and will any body say, that the more ignorant people are, they should have this sacrament administered the oftener to them?

Does not the same Testimony expressly declare our adherence to the Westminster Directory for Worship? Yes, it does. Well, does not that Directory expressly declare, that the Lord's supper ought to be frequently administered, though it leaves to the minister and elders to determine its frequency in their congregations? When it says, *frequently administered in their congregations*, will any body say that its meaning is, it ought to be once or twice a-year administered, though both minister and elders should think it for edification that it should be oftener?

Again, does not the Testimony expressly declare an adherence to all the Acts of Assembly between 1638 and 1650, and those since that

time which are calculated for promoting reformation? And, are there not among them some that require the sacrament of the supper to be administered more frequently than is at present practised? Yes, there are. Now, do these promote reformation? If so, the Papists were mighty reformers in this point, especially in the thirteenth century, when about their worst; and all the Protestant churches have been a sort of apostates, and the apostles the principal ringleaders in the delusion. Or say, do not these acts promote reformation, that is, a conformity to the practice of the church before Popery had defiled her? Certainly, according to this plain explication of the word *reformation*, they do. Then, does it not necessarily follow, that they are approven and espoused in the Testimony?

XI. All the arguments I ever knew advanced in support of the unfrequent administration of the Lord's supper, appear to me altogether destitute of force. The following are the principal:

Objection I. The frequent administration of this ordinance, in the apostolic and primitive ages of Christianity, was commendable and necessary, because the continual persecutions that then raged gave them ground to fear every Sabbath might be their last; whereas now we are not in such danger, and therefore need not so frequent use of this ordinance.

Answer. Ought we not still to live as if every Sabbath were to be our last? Have we now a lease of life more than these had? Did not many Christians in these times live to as great age as we now do? Indeed is it not evident, from the best historians, that the church was generally under no persecution above one third part of the time that weekly communion was practised? But say they had been constantly exposed to the cruellest persecution, the objection becomes still more absurd. If they attended this ordinance weekly at the peril of their lives, does it follow that now, when God gives us greater and better opportunity for it, we ought to omit it? Does God require the greatest work at his peoples hands, when he gives least opportunity? Or, does he require least work when he gives the greatest opportunity for it? What kind of a master must God be if this were the case? Besides, Do not men need this ordinance to preserve them from the influence of the world's smiles, as much as of its frowns? Whether, indeed, has the first or the last been ordinarily most hurtful to the souls of Christians? Is not then the need of this ordinance now greater than in the primitive ages? Did the apostles and others administer this sacrament so often, that persons, being daily in danger of death, might, if possible, have its sacred elements in their belly in their dying moments, as a Popish viaticum to ensare their soul's escape from hell and purgatory in that critical juncture?

Let us invert this objection, and try if it has not more force. It would then run thus: The primitive Christians received the Lord's supper weekly, as their souls were in greater danger from the smiles and allurements of the world, which are usually found more hurtful to mens spiritual concerns than its frowns; and as they had greater opportunity for doing so by their enjoying peace and liberty, yet this frequency of administering and partaking is not requisite now, as we, being under the world's frowns, are in less hazard as to our spiritual concerns; and especially, as we cannot attend upon it but at the peril of our lives, God having expressly declared, that he loves mercy better than sacrifice.

Objection II. The primitive and reformatory times were seasons of great spiritual liveliness, and of large communications of divine influences to the souls of believers; whereas it is quite otherwise now. Therefore, though frequent administration was then commendable, yet, in our languishing decayed state it is unnecessary.

Answer. Ought we to repair seldom to the wells of salvation, because we can bring but little water at once from them? Ought we seldom to endeavour to fill our pitchers at the fountain of living waters, because they are small? Is not this ordinance a cordial for restoring the languishing, strengthening the weak, recovering the sick, and reviving the dying believer? How reason-

able, then, is it to argue that languishing, weak, sick, and dying believers, must not have it often administered to them, just because they are not in *peri et health*? Ought the weak and sickly child to be seldom allowed sick, just because it is not healthy and strong? Ought a weak, sick, languishing person, to be refused the frequent use of cordials and physic, for this very reason, that he has not a strong, robust, healthful constitution? If a garden which, while often watered, continued moist and fruitful, become dry, withered, and barren, when watered only once a-year, ought it to be seldom watered, just because it is dry and withered? If it is not a duty to administer the supper frequently, when Christians are in a languishing decay, then it natively follows that they ought, for the same reason, seldom to communicate. Thus, because they are thirsty and parched, they must not drink; because they sit in darkness, they must beware of often approaching near unto God, that he may be a light unto them; because they are oppressed with deadness, they must avoid using the means of revival.

Would not the objection inverted read better? The primitive Christians had this ordinance frequently administered to them, because, being decayed and withered, weak and sickly, and receiving only scanty communications of divine influence at once, it was necessary for them to be often taking new meat: Whereas we, being nea-

strong and lively Christians, and receiving on sacramental occasions such large supplies of grace, as are sufficient to enable us to walk many days under their powerful influence, have no occasion for so frequently attending on that ordinance, which is especially calculated for strengthening languishing, weak, sickly believers.

Besides, are not the influences of the Spirit, spiritual strength, liveliness, and light, necessary to our right management of prayer, meditation, self-examination, reading, hearing, preaching, &c. as well as to a right observance of the Lord's supper? Would it not be as reasonable then to infer, from the present withdrawal of the Spirit, that we should seldom attend upon these ordinances, as once a month, or once a year, until the Spirit be poured from on high? Can any thing be more absurd?

Obligation III. If the Lord's supper were frequently administered, it would become less solemn and, in time, quite contemptible, as we see is the case with baptism, through the frequency of the administration of that ordinance.

Answer. Is this mean of keeping up the credit of the Lord's supper of God's devising or not? If it is, where is that part of his word that warrants it? The contrary I have already proved from Scripture. Since, then, it is only of mens invention, what ground is there to hope it will really maintain the credit and solemnity of the

ordinance? Did not the Papists of old pretend to maintain and advance its solemnity, by reduction of the frequency of administration? Did they not take away the cup from the people, which, Calvin says, was the native consequence of the former? Did they not annex the administration of this ordinance to those seasons which superstition had aggrandized; namely, Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas? Did they not annex a world of ceremonies to it? Did they not pretend that it was a real sacrifice, and that the elements were changed by consecration into the real body and blood of Christ? And, did all this tend to the support of the proper credit of this ordinance? On the contrary, did it not destroy it? Though the doctrine of transubstantiation procured a kind of reverence for it, yet, was this reverence divine? or, was it not rather devilish, in worshipping the elements? Now, how are we sure that our unfrequent administration of this ordinance will more effectually support its solemnity? Is it not strange that we should have so much encouragement from the practice of the apostles, the primitive Christians, and the whole of the reformed churches, to profane this solemn ordinance; while the most ignorant and abandoned Papists are our original pattern for the course that tends to support its proper honour and credit? What a strange case this must be, if, in order to support the credit of God's ordinance, we must forsake the footsteps of the flock, and walk in the paths originally chalked

out by the most ignorant and wicked antichristians?

Besides, if our unfrequent administration of this ordinance render it solemn, would it not become much more so, if administered only once in seven, ten, twenty, thirty, sixty, or an hundred years? If it is said, many might then die without receiving it, we reply, they may be saved notwithstanding; and may not many die, after their conversion, before they have an opportunity of partaking with us?

Further, it may be asked, why all this partiality for the honour of the sacrament of the supper? Why is not baptism also restricted to once or twice a-year? Why are we not taught that we should seldom pray, read, hear, and meditate, in order to keep up the solemnity of these ordinances, and to avoid formality in them? Can any reason be assigned, why unfrequency should preserve the honour of the Lord's supper, and not also preserve the honour and solemnity of these divine ordinances? Shall we not then find, that those who pray once a-month, or hear sermon once a-year, have their minds far more religiously impressed with solemn views of God, than those who pray seven times a-day, and hear a hundred sermons within the year? Shall we not find, that those who take care never to go out of their own congregation, to communicate in any other place, have far more deep and due impressions of this ordinance upon their spirits, than those who com-

minate ten or twelve times a-year? Shall we not find, that it will be a most wise course to have no sacraments during the whole winter season, as, by this long interval, persons are fitted for coming forward to it in the beginning of summer, with very solemn impressions of it upon their spirits? Shall we not find, that those who frequently communicate will approach unto God with less solemnity at the end of summer than at the beginning? And, if so, why do we not warn people against a practice that takes off a due impression of God from their minds? Is not this ordinance a mean of eminent communion with God? Yes, it is. Is it not dispensed in order that Christ's friends may have eminent communion with God? Yes, surely. Now, does eminent communion with God, frequently obtained, make our impressions of God or his ordinances less solemn, and more contemptible? Yes, it certainly must. If frequent administration of the mean of this communion render it more contemptible, frequent communion with God must render men formal in their addresses to him, if the objection have any force.

As to baptism, is it the frequent administration of this ordinance that renders it so contemptible? Then, why not reduce it to once a year? There is no more necessity of it to salvation than of the supper. Is it not rather the promiscuous administration of it to the children of ignorant and profane persons, together with the private administra-

tion of it, and the short cursory prayers in administering it, that are the true causes of the contempt under which it lies? Moreover, the annexing so many sermons and days to the administration of the Lord's supper, while baptism, a seal of the same covenant, where the same blessings are made over, the same Christ represented, and the same vows made, is administered as if it were a trifling ordinance, which does not come within many degrees of the solemnity of the other, causes many to look upon baptism as far inferior to the Lord's supper.

Let us invert this objection, and see how it stands. All human devices to render God's ordinances more solemn, are impeachments of his wisdom, and have always tended to bring the ordinances into contempt. But unfrequent administration of the supper is a human device, first invented by the worst of Papists, and therefore it tends to bring contempt on this ordinance, as we see sadly verified in the practice of those who voluntarily communicate seldom. Or thus, eminent communion with God, frequently enjoyed, is the most effectual mean for impressing the mind with due reverence of him and his ordinances. Now, the Lord's supper is the ordinance in which the most remarkable communion with God is to be enjoyed; and therefore, as frequent use of this sacrament as Christ allows of, is the most eminent mean for fixing a religious reverence of God, and

of this, and of all other ordinances, upon the minds of believers.

Further, whether is it the frequent repetition of this ordinance upon the same spot of earth, in the same house; or is it the repetition of it to the same people that prostitutes it? If the first, how do the dust and stones influence the contempt of it? If it is the second, then, certainly, it is a partial prostitution of it to administer it frequently to the same persons in different places. Does not this as much tend to render it contemptible, as if we had administered it an equal number of times in the same place, within the same time? If it is a prostitution to administer it frequently to them all, is it not likewise so to administer it to a part? Why then do we not exert ourselves to warn people against receiving the supper frequently, though at different places, since this is as great a prostitution of the ordinance, as to them, as if they received it frequently in the same spot?

Objection IV. If people did communicate conscientiously, it would indeed fix deeper and more due impressions of God and his ordinances; and, in that case, though they had the sacrament administered to them every Sabbath, it would redound to their advantage; but when so much unworthy communicating already takes place when it is but seldom administered, there is little occa-

sion to administer it oftener, as this would afford occasion for more unworthy communicating.

Answer. The whole of this objection is drawn from the abuse of the ordinance by unworthy communicating; but, if it have any force, might we not infer that it ought to be administered only once in twelve, twenty, a hundred, or even a thousand years, since even in this last case there would be too much unworthy communicating?

If the great abuse of an ordinance is a reason for omitting it, then farewell to all gospel ordinances, as none of them ever was, nor ever will be but greatly abused. Must we then pray, read, preach, hear, &c. but seldom, because all these ordinances are sadly abused? If the abuse of an ordinance is any reason against the frequent use of it, why preach we any more than one Sabbath in the year, since to many our preaching is the favour of death unto death, and gives men an occasion to trample under foot the blood of the Son of God? Must God himself be impeached for giving Christ to be the Saviour of the world, and for giving the world frequent offers of him, since he knew many would abuse him, by making this gift the occasion of their greater sin, and more dreadful ruin? Are not the air, the earth, and all the other gifts of God, daily abused? Ought he, therefore, to deprive all mankind of the use of them? or, is he chargeable with the guilt of this abuse if he do not? According to the objection, he certainly is.

Indeed, might not ministers prevent much of the abuse that frequently takes place, in the case of the administration of the supper? Might they not conscientiously deny admission to all ignorant and scandalous persons? And, if they do, ought Christ's children to be starved, because the dogs will snatch at their food, or because they themselves cannot receive it as they ought? Say no, believers might be nourished by other gospel ordinances, though they wanted the more frequent use of this; for might they not be nourished by prayer, meditation, &c. without the preaching of the word? Might not the elect even be converted by reading God's word? Would it therefore be a small affair, nay a duty, to allow them only once a-year the preaching of the word, an ordinance more especially appointed for that effect? Besides, whether do men involve themselves in most guilt by *causing*, or merely by *occasioning* the abuse? The decision of this point requires not a moment's hesitation. In the former case, a man joins with the devil; in the latter, he joins with God. Well, what if by reason of the long intervals between a believer's opportunities to draw near to God, and enjoy communion with him in this ordinance, their souls are rendered sadly carnal, and destitute of that humility, awe of God, and love to him and his people, which frequent nearness to him would have produced, and so they must come to this ordinance cold, like ions which have been long out of the fire, and,

consequently, must greatly abuse it. Now, those ministers who withhold from believers the frequent use of this ordinance, have an active hand in all this coldness and deadness, which might have been prevented, had not the intervals between opportunities of communicating been unnecessarily rendered so long. Well, ought ministers, merely in order to then *occupy* unworthy communicating, in which God joins with them, to involve themselves in negligently *causing* unworthy communicating, in which they join issue with Satan? Ought they, under pretence of preventing the guilt of some, to involve themselves and others in the very same guilt? Says not the apostle, that the damnation of such is just?

Objection V. Such as are willing may attend sacramental occasions in other congregations, and then multitudes of saints may meet, and, with their united prayers, draw down remarkable blessings on the ordinance. Many ministers will come up, whose various gifts will be more pleasing and edifying than if there were a few; and a fest, if not two, with a Friday's exercise, three sermons on the Saturday, with two on the Monday, are all got through; by all which the proper dignity and solemnity of this ordinance is kept up, which could not be the case if it were frequently administered in each congregation.

Answer. Can all that are dear to God attend sacramental occasions at the distance of ten, twenty,

thirty, or forty miles? How shall servants, the weak, and the poor do so? What if two thirds of a congregation be of this sort? Shall ministers pity such least, when it is known Christ pitied them most?

Besides, might not as many meet on every occasion, though the sacrament were administered in the same place three or four times yearly, as do at present? If they are suitably prouded by this ordinance, it is certain believers would be more desirous after fresh opportunities; and, what loss would there be, though some hypocrites staid at home? Would not the force of prayers be three or four times as great than it is at present? Indeed, what if ministers *practically* encouraging frequent communion so little, by administering this ordinance seldom, be the reason why so few attend sacramental occasions in other places? Are not the people under the charge of these ministers that speak against the frequent administration of this ordinance, among the most slothful and careless in this respect? Though believers have occasion to communicate in their own congregation four times a-year, yet, if they can, does not Christ allow them to communicate other forty-eight times? Will, then, their communicating eight four times, influence them to be so far behind, if it is in their power to wait upon other opportunities? If pastors administer it in their congregations as often as possible, can they not with a good grace excite their people to attend in other

places, which they cannot conscientiously do, if they neglect the administration of it when they might have the opportunity?

Indeed, supposing it to be administered twelve times a year, though the assemblies might be less, yet might there not be about nine times more remembering the death of Christ, and nine times the force of prayer that now takes place on sacramental occasions? Nay, if these, in communicating work, should be strengthened as much in their inner man, as some have been by very frequent communicating, would not the force of all the prayers put up on sacramental occasions be at least eighteen times greater than it is at present? If this sacrament were administered every Sabbath, as we hope will be the case during the glory of the latter days, and perhaps sooner, what though the multitudes shall be less, yet are there not many more employed in the same work?

But, indeed, if the meeting of a multitude be so necessary to the dispensation of this ordinance, why did not Christ invite all his followers, (many of whom, we have reason to believe, were then in Jerusalem) to attend at his room to join in the first sacramental supper? If this room could not contain them, could he not have provided a larger one?

Again, does a multitude of ministers, with their various gifts, add any proper solemnity to this ordinance? Was the administration by Christ and his apostles less solemn than ours, because there

was but one minister employed in the administration? Was the administration less solemn in our covenanting periods, when one or two ministers were all the assistants? Has ever so much of God been seen at sacramental occasions, where there were many assistants, as where there have been few? Witness the sacrament at the kirk of Shots, and those in the north of Ireland about 1630, when compared with any sacrament where there were many ministers.

Indeed, how can it be expected that the variety of ministers should add to the usefulness of the administration? Can there be any proper edification but according to the proportion of the divine presence? Is this divine presence always proportioned to the number of ministers? If it is not, might not people be as much profited though there were fewer ministers? What if endeavouring to please people with a vast variety of ministers, tends to encourage itching ears? What if God, like that eminent Assembly of 1695, count it robbery in ministers unnecessarily to leave their congregations vacant, especially if few or none of their hearers can attend in any other place? What if God count it robbery to deprive his people of the frequent use of this sacrament, by needlessly attending to assist others? If he do it, will not the presence of mere ministers than are necessary be a hindrance in the way of the divine presence, and of proper edification? If God's power reach not the hearts of the hearers, what avails it how

well their ears and fancies are pleased with the variety of ministers gifts?

I am not averse to the custom of a fast preparation, and a thanksgiving day, if the exercises on these days are considered as means for encouraging strangers to attend, AS THEY HAVE IT SO SELDOM AT HOME, and when they are considered as means for deepening the solemnity of the approach to God in this ordinance, which, in our present case, is quite, or next to quite worn off, in the long intervals between ordinances of this nature. But is it not plain, that in case the church were returned to the primitive custom, there would be no need to encourage strangers to attend, because they would have weekly opportunities for partaking at home? And there would be less need to use means of this nature to fix or deepen these impressions; the conscientious approach to God in this solemn ordinance, the Sabbath before and the Sabbath after, would more effectually prepare the soul for receiving and rivetting divine impressions, than all the work of these three days.

When these days exercises are considered as well meant human helps, during the present unfrequency of administration, nobody regards them more than I do; but if any body considers them, as too many ignorant people do, as essential parts of this ordinance, and plead the absolute necessity of them, as a reason against the more frequent administration of the supper, can I, in consistency with our Confession of Faith, chap. 21. § 1. re-

frain from *detesting* that view of them, and the usage proceeding therefrom, as **REFINED POPERY**? Are they not of human invention? Was not the invention of them merely occasional? Are they not still unknown in many Protestant churches? Were they not unknown in the church of Scotland, for about seventy years after the Reformation? Do we not find one of our best Assemblies, namely, that of 1645, prohibiting to have any more than one sermon upon Saturday, and another upon Monday? Did not Mr Livingston, as long as he lived, refuse to allow any more sermons on the Saturday and Monday at his sacramental occasions? Now, is it not plainly Popish, to count human inventions, and occasional additions, *essential* parts of this great ordinance?

Besides, is it *reasonable* to plead the *necessity* of these exercises to the **EXTRUSION** of a divine ordinance? What would we think of the man who, when he had opportunity to hear sermons on Sabbath but twice in the year, had thought meet to appoint a fast-day in his family, a preparation day on Saturday, and the Monday for thanksgiving, on each of these occasions, if afterwards, when he might have sermon every Sabbath, he should refuse it, giving this as the reason, that he could not every week get three days set apart to the Lord, and that without this it would be a profanation to wait upon public worship, and the want of these would deprive

him of all due impressions of this ordinance? The case is exactly parallel. Family worship approaches as near the solemnity of public hearing the word, and public prayers, as hearing of sermons doth to that of communicating. Setting apart these three days for family worship on such occasions, is merely a human contrivance, and so also is the setting apart these days on sacramental occasions. Setting apart these three days for family devotion, in the above circumstances, might be very expedient, and may have the signal countenance of God. But could this man's three days of family devotion be lawful? Could it be blessed of God, if adhered to as a reason for neglecting to attend on public worship through the other Sabbaths of the year?

Again, if we look on these as essential appendages of the supper, why is it that we are not as careful for the reputation and credit of the sacrament of baptism? Why exalt we the one seal so far above the other? or rather, why exalt we the one to the depression of the other? Is it not very awful to see professed ones come twenty or thirty miles to attend the sacrament of the supper, and yet, on the Monday, practically declare, that they think not baptism the other seal of the covenant, worthy of a few minutes attendance?

In fine, whether is it grace or corruption that most affects to aid human devices to God's worship, in order to make it more splendid than Christ has left it? May not persons be as really

guilty of Popery, by doting on the splendid pomp of divine ordinances, that consists in the variety of days, sermons, and ministers, as by doting on the variety of fantastic ceremonies used in the Popish mass? Ought we not to beware of adding to God's ordinances, as well as of taking from them? Is God content to barter with us in this point, by giving up with the frequent administration of the supper, if we will annex a few more days, sermons, ministers, and people to it, when seldom administered? Where does he either make or declare his acceptance of this proposal?

Objection VI. Ministers could not endure the fatigue of visiting and examining their congregations between every sacrament, if it were frequently administered; neither could they bear the fatigue in their persons, nor the expence in their families; nor could the sessions support the weight of charges necessary on these occasions.

Answer. What minister spends not too much of his time in trifling conversation, useless reading, or unnecessary sleep, &c.? Would he be at any loss if he redeemed that, and bestowed it upon the visitation and examination of his people? But if, during the intervals between the sacraments, this could not be accomplished, what law of God requires it as a duty? Did the apostles so? Do they all so who administer the sacrament only twice a-year? Might not congregations be visited and examined as often as they are at pre-

sent, though the Lord's supper were more frequently administered? Might not the more ignorant, by frequent examination for some years, become more intelligent, and thus the work would become more easy? Might not many scandals be nipt in the bud, if the sacrament were frequently administered? Would not this relieve ministers of a part of their present troubles? Of what use, indeed, are ministers bodies and spirits, but to be spent in Christ's service? If they singly devote them to this, has not he promised, that as their days are so shall their strength be? Did not several of the apostles live to a good old age, notwithstanding their uncommon fatigue? If ministers, by an excessive care of their bodies, preserve their health and strength beyond the date of their usefulness, who gains by that? Are there more useless beings on earth than ministers in these circumstances? Besides, is not the present unsrequency of administration the principal occasion of much fatigue on these occasions? Does it not tempt ministers to shift off their visitation, examination, and inquiries into scandals, upon the most trifling grounds, till there be a near prospect of another sacrament? Does not this bring upon them the whole load at once?

With respect to the expence in ministers families, I would ask, what law of God or man requires that they should be at so much cost in their families upon such occasions? How much

does it tend to the welfare of the souls of their family, or to the edification of others ?

I would ask, with respect to the third part of the objection, when was there a sacramental occasion, when the collection was not more than sufficient to defray the charges ? Will it not be found upon trial, that a penny for every communicant will defray the neat charges of the necessary bread and wine to be used in the sacrament ? Will there not also be on every occasion something more collected for relief of the poor ? Say not, there is a vast deal of charges necessary besides the neat charges of the elements ? Are not these expences, as to the most of them, rather *usual* than *necessary* ? If sessions had to bestow them out of their own pockets, is it probable they would have made them so large as in some cases they are ? Must these *unnecessary* though *usual* expences in ministers families, and upon sessions, be also considered as *essential* parts of this sacrament, the want of which must stop its frequency ? Is it not evidently Popish to view these unnecessary charges as supports of the proper dignity of the ordinance ? What would we think of the man who thought fit to annex to every Sabbath which he observed, or to every diet of family worship, the preparing of a sumptuous feast, and the giving of a large sum to the poor, and then should tell us, he could not possibly celebrate more than one or two Sabbaths in the year, or observe any more than one or two diets of family worship, because

his estate could not support the expences he was put to on these occasions? Could this reason be sustained? Is not the application easy?

Objection VII. The passover was administered but once a-year; therefore the Lord's supper, which is come in its room, ought not to be administered more frequently.

Answer. Was the passover a pattern for regulating the celebration of the supper by, or not? If it was, then, since nobody was required or allowed to eat the passover more than once a-year, does it not follow, that nobody is allowed to communicate more than once a-year? Why then do we not warn our people of the sinfulness of communicating any oftener than once a-year? If the passover is to be our rule, why do we not attach also to the supper, seven days of unleavened bread? Besides, is the feast of the supper commemorative of the time of the deliverance, as the passover was*? Why then is not the celebration of the supper fixed to Easter, the time when Christ was crucified? Are not Papists and Episcopalian exact in fixing the principal administration of it to that time? Again, was not the passover to be eaten at the place where God's tabernacle or temple should be, and no where else? Why then do not objectors plead, that the sacrament of the supper should be administered only in one place, as Jerusalem, Rome; and that Christians should

* Exod. xiii. 4. 10. xxiv. 18.

come up from all places thither? Indeed, in this case, once a year would be found more than many could attend. Besides, were women required of God to come up to the passover? No*. Why then do we talk as if women were as much as men obliged to partake of the Lord's supper? in fine, did not the apostles know that the passover was but once a-year administered? Surely. Why then did they administer the supper two and fifty times a-year, when they ought to have made the annual celebration of the passover their pattern? Need I any farther expose the vanity of this objection?

Objection VIII. Frequent administration of this ordinance is a conforming to Independents.

Answer. To whom do we conform in the unfrequent administration of this ordinance? Did not Papists first introduce the custom? Were they not the first who gave it a kind of judicial approbation, and that, too, at the Synod or Council which established Transubstantiation? To whom besides do we conform? Is it not to persecuting and bloody Episcopilians, and backsliding Presbyterians? Are these more worthy of imitation than the apostles, the primitive Christians, and all the Protestant churches at the Reformation? Must we refuse to imitate these, as far as possible, because some persons having great faults will walk with us a few steps? Besides, what connection is

* Exod. xxiii. 17. Deut. xvi. 16.

there between the principles of these persons, and the frequent administration of the Lord's supper? Whatever accidental connection there be, I challenge any man to shew there is any in the nature of things.

Objection left. Mr Boston, and other great men, never administered the supper more than once a-year.

Answer. What if he thought the supper should be more frequently administered; but through the encouragements he met with from brethren on that point, or the prejudices he found in his congregation against it, deferred putting his sentiments in execution, as has been the case with many other great men? How many have even pled from the press for the more frequent administration of this ordinance, who could never get their sentiments reduced to practice? Indeed, what though Mr Boston was of opinion that annual administration was sufficient? Are not the apostles, and many other great men among the ancients, together with Calvin, Luther, Owen, &c. nay, all the Protestant churches at home and abroad, particularly the church of Scotland in both her covenanting periods; our Books of Discipline; our Directory for worship, &c. all against him in that point? What is Mr Boston's authority, when laid in the balance with the authority of all these? Have not all the great men who have been of these sentiments, if indeed there

have been any such, been ashamed of the public defence of their sentiments, though they have got the highest provocation thereto from the opposite party? Ought we zealously to follow what they themselves seem ashamed to own?

*Si quid melius nosti imperte
Si non bis ntere.* —HORACE.

THE END.

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